



THE UNION.



"FROM THE LITTLE ACORN GROWS THE MASSIVE OAK."

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A PAIR OF SINNERS.

BY A. St. JOHN ADCOCK.

SHE was the only daughter of a draper who had once been eminent and was now retired; he was a young and prosperous barrister. Her manners and habits of thought were, perhaps, overrefined and affected; she was of a morbidly poetical temperament, and looked at life always through a prism of sentiment. He was unimaginative and practical.

He had all those sterner qualities she lacked; she had all those dainty, tender graces he despised—until he found them in her. In a word, each was the complement of the other.

Naturally, then, when they met they loved; and she was too romantic and he too matter-of-fact to believe in a long engagement.

They had been two months married, and but just returned from the honeymoon, were seated cozily by the fire one wild, wintry evening, when Mabel, in a languishing mood of sentimental melancholy, unburdened herself of a tardy confession.

It had really never occurred to her during the rapture of their short engagement, but once or twice before since their marriage it had risen to her lips, but, fearing it might make a note of discord in the harmony of their wedded lives, she had left it unspoken. It was a trifle, no doubt; but hers was a disposition that magnified trifles. She found a subtle joy in grief, as do all who are surfeited with happiness, and, under such circumstances, the smallness of the grief is no disadvantage.

"Are you sure, Clarence," she asked, him, sighing, "that you really love me?"

"Absolutely, dearest."

"And you have never loved anyone but me?"

"Never—never—never!"

"And you will love me always?"

"Forever."

He yawned and looked at his watch. They were half expecting a visitor.

"Something might happen to change you," she persisted, dreamily.

"What could?"

"Suppose I had a secret in my life which I had never revealed to you?"

She regarded him yearningly.

"What sort of secret?"

"I always used to say, dear, that I had told you all about myself—everything; that I was keeping nothing back from you. I am so sorry!" Her eyes grew misty with tears. "I did not intend to deceive you. There is one—only one—event of my life I have never mentioned to you. I had forgotten it until lately. It is not much, perhaps, but I ought not to hide anything from you, ought I? It has been my one secret—the one page of my life I would rather no one read—"

"Well—and what is it?" he interrupted, a little irritably.

She sank down on the rug beside him in an attitude of supplication, and clasped her arms about his knees.

"Don't look at me so coldly, Clarence," she pleaded. "Don't speak so harshly. Say you will forgive me, dearest. I know there should be no secrets between us, but it is such a little, little secret, and I never meant to—"

"No—no. Well—let me know what it is."

"It overwhelmed me with shame. Oh, words cannot tell how deeply it humiliated me."

"My dear child, do calm yourself." He laughed, but felt vaguely uneasy. "It can't have been anything so very awful."

"You will not think I hesitated to tell you sooner because I distrusted the strength of your love?"

"Of course not."

"Or because I feared"—she stifled a little sob—"you might scorn me, as that heartless man did!"

"What heartless man?" he demanded, sharply. "Don't mystify me with all this preamble, Mabel. Tell me the worst, at once."

"And you will forgive me, dear, for not confiding?"

"Oh, no doubt. It is nothing much, I'll be bound. You are scaring us both with a bogey of your own making. What is it?"

"I will tell you, Clarence."

She dried her eyes, and, reaching up, laid a hand upon his shoulder caressingly.

"Did you know, dear, that I once used to write poetry?"

"Well, many persons do that. It may be foolish, but it is not wicked."

"I wrote a great deal of it. My sole ambition then was to be a poetess. Much of what I wrote was love poetry—"

"Addressed, I presume, to the heartless man you just referred to?"

"No, dear. It was addressed to quite imaginary persons."

"Well, well! Yes?"

"And about six years ago, dear, I collected all my poems into a volume and published them."

"And the heartless man was the publisher?"

"No. The publisher was exceedingly kind. He thought very highly of my work—"

"Never mind the publisher. I am anxious to get to that heartless man."

"The book was published, and I saw only one review of it, and that—it was in a paper called The Writer—Oh, Clarence, it was cruel—cruel!"

"If that is all—"

"All! It humiliates me to think of it even now. I remember every harrowing word of it, but I cannot—cannot bring myself to repeat them."

"Don't try to. My dear girl, why on earth should you upset yourself like this over a trivial matter that happened and was forgotten six years ago by everybody but yourself?"

"But think how I suffered! The publicity—the disgrace! 'These poems,' he wrote—oh, do not ask me what he said."

"I assure you, I won't."

"For months after I avoided all who knew me. Such contempt—such ridicule as he poured upon me in that review! If there is any man I hate—yes, hate, Clarence!—it is he."

"And yet he may be quite a harmless, inoffensive sort of ass, if we only knew him."

"I withdrew the book instantly and burnt the entire edition."

"If all authors accepted their critics' version in the same spirit, that man who wrote about the hundred best authors would have had to fix his total at 50."

"I felt as if all the world was laughing at me."

"You little silly. I don't suppose even a millionth part of the world knew anything about it. Nobody reads reviews of books—except the men who write them."

"I could not regard it so stoically," she sighed. "I cannot even now. You do not altogether realize my utter degradation: 'These babblings of incipient imbecility.' That was one of his phrases."

She shuddered at the recollection of it.

"By Jove! Of course, the best of critics are not angels, but yours must have been a—"

"A heartless, heartless man!"

"If it had been a man's book—"

"He may not have known I was a woman."

"You are too severe. No reviewer criticises a book till he has read the title page."

"But I did not use my own name. I wanted to see if they would mistake my work for that of a man. I called it 'Heart Longings, by Harold Ransom; but all my friends knew, so that really made no difference."

"Not a bit."

He had grown suddenly thoughtful, and spoke absently.

"You will forgive me, darling—won't you?—for deceiving you?"

"Deceiving me?" he asked.

"Well, for seeming not to confide in you unreservedly?"

Taking the childish, pretty face between his hands he gazed down into her dreamy blue eyes, and laughed softly to himself.

"I—don't—know," he said.

"But—it was nothing actually wrong, Clarence," she cried, indignantly; then, melting again. "I know, dear, I used to say all along that I had concealed nothing from you. I had told you everything—"

"I used to say the same to you, didn't I?"

"Yes."

"Well, coming to think of it, I remember I have a secret which I have never disclosed to you. So, after all, we are each as bad as the other."

She started, and scanned his features eagerly.

"You? A secret, Clarence?"

"Only a little one—like yours."

"But mine was no secret. I had forgotten it," she protested. "Besides, mine was nothing for which you could blame me!"

"I wish I could say that of mine."

"Clarence!" she sobbed, "you have been deceiving me!"

"No; I had forgotten about it."

"You always said," she faltered, her lips quivering, "you never loved any girl until you met me."

"Now, I want you to make me a promise: If I forgive you, you will forgive me?"

She hesitated.

"Tell me, first, all about it."

"Do you promise?" he insisted.

"Oh, Clarence, you can never be the same to me again! I do hope it is nothing dreadful. What can it be? I—I—"

"Do you—"

"Yes, yes, dear. I promise!" she said, desperately. "Whatever it is, I love you, and I must forgive you."

"You won't hate me?"

"I could not."

She pressed her handkerchief to her eyes.

"I won't keep you in suspense," said he. "We have both been sinners, and I was the worst of the two. I must tell you, then. Before I was a successful barrister, I was a good-for-nothing young scoundrel, with a very good opinion of myself and a very bad one of everybody else. I was a wicked young dog, and did several scandalous things that I am ashamed of now."

She caught her breath and waited in an agony of expectation. He seemed very serious, and yet a baffling smile was flickering round the corners of his mouth.

"They were all of the same description, but I am sorry on account of one in particular."

"And that?"

"Well, being hard up, I used to earn odd guineas in all manner of odd ways. I was a flippant, self-satisfied brute, and—" he paused, and putting an arm about her, drew her closer to him. "I have a heart now—you know I have, sweetheart, don't you? But once upon a time—you have promised to forgive me and not to hate me!—in the days when you published your book, I was—"

"You—you—were—?"

"The heartless man who reviewed it!"

—St. Paul's.

He Had to Own Up.

He had taken his shoes off and was about to creep upstairs, when he stumbled over the umbrella rack.

"John," came a voice from the head of the stairs, "is that you?"

"Yesh, m'dear."

"Are you intoxicated?"

"Hie—no'm."

"Say 'special personal prerogatives' then," continued the relentless voice.

There was an interval of silence.

"John."

"Yesh."

"Well, why don't you say it?"

"I'm intoshicated—hie—m'dear."

Then, hanging his shoes on the hat rack, he took his hat in his hand and proceeded upstairs.—N. Y. Journal.

Oyster Bouillon.

A recipe for oyster bouillon calls for two dozen large oysters, drained and chopped fine. These are put into a double boiler and heated slowly in water, to draw out as much juice as possible. They are then put through a fine sieve, and every bit of the liquor pressed out. This liquor, added to that already drained, is put on the fire in a porcelain saucepan, and into it is beaten the white of one egg. Let it come to a boil for about one minute, then remove from the fire, and after it has stood for three or four minutes, strain through a piece of cheesecloth, doubled. Before serving, season and add as much hot milk as you have oyster juice. Dry toast cut in squares or oblongs is handed around with the bouillon.—N. Y. Post.

An Explanation.

The Pastor—Mawmin'. Sistah Simpkins. How is it I didn't see yo' in chuch las' Sunday?

Sister Simpkins—I—I—I wasn't dere.—Puck.

Lemon and Eggs.

A squeeze of lemon improves scrambled eggs, and should be added while they are cooking.—Cincinnati Enquirer.